

OPEN AND SHUT?

Friday, February 27, 2009

Chaos, Solitons & Fractals: Still looking for an editor

While the Elsevier [nonlinear](#) science journal *Chaos, Solitons & Fractals* (CS&F) expects to publish its delayed first issue of 2009 next week, it appears that the publisher has yet to find a new editor.

Last November, when *Nature* published a number of allegations about the founding editor of CS&F [M. S. El Naschie](#), and the way in which peer review had been conducted at the journal, Elsevier informed me that M. S. El Naschie would be retiring, and that this would be announced in the first issue of the journal published in 2009.

"[A]s a former editor El Naschie will no longer be involved in editorial decision making for the journal," Elsevier spokesperson Shira Tabachnikoff added.

When CS&F's first issue of 2009 failed to appear, however, rumours began to circulate on the Internet that there had been a disagreement over M. S. El Naschie's retirement. Amongst other things, [letters](#) purporting to have been written on behalf of the editorial board were posted on the Web stating that M. S. El Naschie did not intend to step down as editor, and hinting at legal action against Elsevier.

On 13th February, however, Tabachnikoff emailed me to [say](#) that the first issue of 2009 would be available electronically on February 20th, and the paper version would be published on 10th March.

The electronic version failed to appear online on 20th February and, as of today, it is still [not available](#). Currently, the [backlog](#) of articles waiting to be published has grown to 965.

I emailed Elsevier last week to find out what had happened, and received a reply yesterday: "The delay in publishing this issue is due to very pragmatic, operational reasons," wrote Tabachnikoff. "The latest update I have been given is that the journal is now in line to be uploaded onto ScienceDirect and we expect on Monday [2nd March] it will be up."

Tabachnikoff added, "The paper version will be published mid-March. March 10th is an estimate as it is hard to say exactly what day it will be finalised."

After receiving this reply I asked Tabachnikoff for the name of CS&F's new editor. She replied: "We do not yet have a new editor, but as [stated](#) on our website we are still in discussion about filling this position. The publisher will work with the editorial board and other advisors to identify a new editor, as well as reviewing the aims and scope of the journal, as well as the editorial policies and submission arrangements."

Conscious that researchers have been wondering about the status of the 900 plus papers in the publication queue I also asked whether Elsevier planned to send any of the papers out to be re-reviewed prior to publication.

"The coming editions of CS&F will publish papers that have been pending publication which were already peer reviewed when El Naschie was the editor," said Tabachnikoff. "These papers will not be reviewed again, and authors have signed copyright agreements."

I also asked how many of the papers in the queue had been authored by M. S. El Naschie. "At this point it is hard to establish how many papers in future issues are authored by El Naschie," replied Tabachnikoff. Saying that she hoped to find out more next week she added: "I do know that the first issue will not contain any of his papers."

Finally, I asked if all disagreements between Elsevier and M.S. El Naschie, both over the journal itself, and over his retirement as editor, have now been resolved.

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13m



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And where exactly is the contract for the author to read and review?

17m

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Tabachnikoff replied: "At the moment, we have no outstanding issues and/or problems with El Naschie."

Despite [a number of attempts](#) I have been unable to speak to M. S. El Naschie.

In the meantime, it seems likely that critics of the way in which Elsevier has handled the situation will remain unappeased. Zoran Škoda, a theoretical physicist at the Ruđer Bošković Institute in Zagreb, Croatia, for instance, believes that by not having papers that were approved under the old editorial regime re-reviewed, Elsevier has "made the worst possible decision."

For this reason, he adds, Elsevier should be criticised harshly. "Before they could say that they did not understand the problem, but now they do."

##

Update 3rd March

As promised by Elsevier, the January 15th issue of CS&F was [published yesterday](#), 2nd March 2009. An accompanying "Publisher's note" reads:

The Founding Editor for Chaos, Solitons and Fractals Dr El Naschie has retired as Editor-in-Chief. The publisher will work with the editorial board and other advisors to identify a new editor. This is likely to also lead to revision of the aims and scope of the journal, as well as the editorial policies and submission arrangements. Prospective authors can keep informed of the progress on this through the journal's homepage.

With the journal now apparently operating with no one at the helm the debate appears to be [moving on](#) to the question of whether, and for how long, a peer-reviewed journal can operate without an editor-in-chief.

Update 16th March 2010: CS&F has been [relaunched](#) with two new co-editors-in-chief, a new editorial board and refined aims and scope.

Posted by Richard Poynder at [11:23](#)



7 comments:

Anonymous said...

If some are concerned that Elsevier will not be re-reviewing the papers going into subsequent issues, I suggest that these people perform their own informal reviews (for at least the first issue of 2009). I mean, if you want something done right, do it yourself. I really can't think of a better person than John Baez, being that he is both a mathematician and a physicist, and that he has previously expressed interest in the matter.

That said, it's interesting that the initial complaint was about the content of El Naschie's papers and his abuse of editorial power. Then there were comments about how the entire journal could not possibly be salvaged. Now there are requests to re-review the papers (which, ironically, implies salvageability). It just seems like the issue at hand is changing on a daily basis, always trying to be one step ahead of what Elsevier did yesterday to placate those concerned. Seems personal to me.

[February 27, 2009 4:39 pm](#)

Anonymous said...

P.S. I've stated before on the blogs Backreaction and The Reference Frame that I have papers accepted by Chaos, Solitons & Fractals.

As comments by Scherer and Motl indicate, my second paper '[Is The Anisotropic...](#)' is not really worth printing, even as a toy model. I have a great deal of respect for both of these bloggers, and have no reason to disbelieve them.

As for the remaining three papers ([1](#), [2](#), [3](#)), I've received nothing but positive feedback on them.

I can only assume that a secondary review would produce some negative feedback, which I am always interested in hearing (even if these papers do not end up being printed). This applies especially to [3](#).

[February 27, 2009 6:20 pm](#)

Anonymous said...

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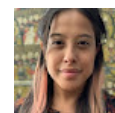
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[March 25, 2009 8:30 pm](#) 

Anonymous said...

Just an FYI:

Chaos, Solitons & Fractals Volume 41, Issue 2, Pages 521-1040 (30 July 2009) came out recently. It contains a single paper by El Naschie. I think now is an appropriate time for anyone looking to criticize his work to speak up.

The paper is:

Higgs mechanism, quarks confinement and black holes as a Cantorian spacetime phase transition scenario
Pages 869-874
M.S. El Naschie

[June 03, 2009 4:55 pm](#) 



Richard Poynder said...

Hi Shawn, Perhaps you'd like to share with us your views on the paper you cite?

[June 03, 2009 5:02 pm](#) 

Anonymous said...

The content discussed in this paper is way above my head. This is why I am asking for those who oppose El Naschie's methods to review this single paper. If they find that the paper is unsatisfactory, then it would also go to show that Elsevier did not send the paper out for a re-review, as was suggested by the opposition. These are all things that they were interested in during the past few months, so I don't think that this type of request is out of the ordinary.

I do have one concern, about the passage "In fact at -273 the volume of a gas would become zero and disappear altogether provided a phase transition does not take place theoretically". This part is confusing to me. I am assuming it has to do with Bose-Einstein condensation, but I do not understand how a 0 volume would be obtained.

Anyway, even though I find the opposition's tactics a little outrageous, I am still open to their opinion. This also applies to my own papers. I have received negative reviews many times in the past by non-anonymous parties (whom I am still friendly with), and have used those reviews in an attempt to improve myself. In other words, I'm not being facetious here.

[June 03, 2009 10:28 pm](#) 



Richard Poynder said...

Shawn, You will see from Elsevier's comment above that they are definitely not sending the papers out for re-review:

"The coming editions of CS&F will publish papers that have been pending publication which were already peer reviewed when El Naschie was the editor. These papers will not be reviewed again, and authors have signed copyright agreements."

What you say about the paper being way above your head is telling I think, since it will also be way above the head of most people in the world.

This highlights the fact that even publishers like Elsevier will at times be unable to judge whether a paper has been properly reviewed. If they are not specialists in the topic themselves, how will any publisher know this? And where does final responsibility lie?

[June 06, 2009 8:39 am](#) 

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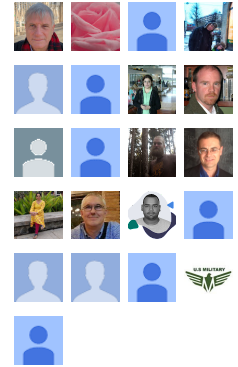
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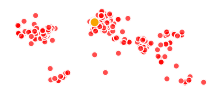
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